

This is a travel article...Ok?

I recently received one of the only complaints about my magazine in its ten year life span. The very nice and diplomatic local suggested that I should get back to writing about local stuff instead of rabbiting on about unrelated things like... my holidays.

I protested that my Noosa article was an attempt to give our industry a bit of inspiration and advice. I was serious too! This time however I have no other intent than to rabbit on about my holiday in Sumatra. Let's call it a 'travel article'. I did book my flights through Macarthur Travel in Camden... A local connection!

Do you have a dream destination for a trip? "About a thousand!" I hear you yelling at me. Ok, but most of us have one that stands out - The exotic, the passionate, the sentimental. My passion is surfing. For me the isolated Mentawi Islands in Sumatra had been calling my name for some years. I finally got there and for me my dream destination was everything I had built it up to be.

Many times friends of mine would be booking surf trips to exotic places and ask me to join them. For all sorts of reasons I was always unable. Until July this year. An opportunity arose and I jumped at it without considering much else. This time I was going.

After eight hours on an evening flight to Singapore I saw very little of the beautiful, tiny island nation. We arrived about 10pm

local time and headed straight to our hotel. We arrived to find a mix up had two of us sharing a bed... Ah well, Luke is a pretty good looking bloke. Nothing to report.

A quick lunchtime flight to Padang the next day saw me thrown into a massive culture shock. This is the first third world city I have ever seen. It was chaotic, filthy, noisy... and all together fascinating. I sat quietly as our taxi wove its way through some crazy arcade game called traffic. I was suffering a senses overload. My camera was packed away. I wished I had it in my hand. Photo opportunities flew by the taxi like sheets of rain.

We arrived at the harbour where our boat awaited. Surfboards and bags were piled on while we met our travel companions. Three guys from Western Australia, two from Tasmania and a couple (yes the only girl) from California. After a few drinks that night it was clear that we would all get on famously.

Our 115 feet Phinisi Schooner, 'Laut India' meandered (12 hours) through the night across the strait between Padang and the Mentawi Islands. We arrived at our first destination just after dawn. This is the famous right hand break named 'Hollow Trees'. It was hard to tell from behind the break, but the regulars on our trip were claiming, "it is probably bigger than it looks." Then one of them said, "I'm not going out here, I've just had too many bad experiences on that 'surgeon's table'." He was referring to the inside reef. A very shallow outcrop of razor sharp reef



awaits anyone who wants to take their wave a little too far.

OK, clearly the advice from the experts was that you do not want to be caught on this reef. I was... three times! The third ripped off one of my protective rubber boots never to be seen again. Thank goodness I had them on for the first two excursions on the Surgeon's Table. I hit the reef hard both times. Ah well, no protection for the rest of the trip.

It had been a quality first session and everyone was in high spirits as we headed for our surf camp at 'Macaronis'.

The bay at Macaronis is a beauty beyond belief. About a kilometre across, the jungle lined beaches are straight out of a tropical paradise brochure. The reef called Macaronis sits at the entrance to the bay so our attention is diverted as we sail by. This is after all what we came for, round, perfect waves.

What lay ahead was eight days filled with as much surfing as we could possibly fit in. With the water and air temperature both hovering around 30° and a boat to drop you at the reef, we weren't complaining. Some days though that meant three surfs totalling over seven hours in the water. I had done a bit of work before this trip but mostly on my upper body. My arms got through it fine, it was my legs that were packing it in. Yes I am getting old.

As you would imagine with a group of men on holidays, the other sport we participated in was 'consumption'. Sensational Indonesian food and Bintang. There were a few wild nights which resulted in a mass of injuries as the boys ran amok. I had one of my best days in the surf after one of the wild bar parties. Only a few of us hit Macaronis on that Sunday morning when the swell was probably at its peak for the whole week. I had three surfs that day and all of them were memorable.

The ultimate day though for me was Thursday

30th July, 2009. The surf was good in the morning but the wind was light onshore. By lunch time it had swung around and a group of us had fluked it to be in the water at the right time. There were a few other guys out (coincidentally from Wollongong) so the total might have been eight or nine.

I was sitting chatting when a good size wave with plenty of 'weight' outside the take off zone was allowed to slip through the main pack and I started paddling. It was one of those effortless paddles which sees you up cleanly and in position immediately. I decided to pull straight in knowing that there was plenty of wave on the other side of the peak. I grabbed the rail and 'sat down' on the wall of the wave to slow down for the first section. It took a split second to throw over me but it wasn't long before I was very deep and travelling at top speed. Sometimes it doesn't matter how deep you get, you have a real sense that you are definitely coming out.

It was one of the cleanest tubes I had recorded on this trip so that was good enough. But when I came out and stood upright smiling contentedly, I looked across to the boats in the channel where no less than three photographers were celebrating my tube.

Most 'normal' surfers never get a great photograph of themselves surfing, let alone good footage. I had both. The footage was shot by one of the resort staff, Hendrick. It is less than ten seconds long, but it is gold to me. I also have four sequence shots by Natalie (remember the American couple?). Her partner Justin is a professional photographer and his camera outputs 60 meg files! Man, I could produce a billboard poster with the bloody things.

That Thursday night sitting in the bar watching the footage on the big screen... I could have gone home there and then. I think I went to sleep with a smile on my face. Dream holiday complete. "Beam me up Scotty."



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